

March 31, 1999 Project Update

MEXICAN WOLF RECOVERY PROGRAM

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

in cooperation with

Arizona Game and Fish Department

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish

USDA Wildlife Services

Project Update: *July 1998 - March 1999*

Purpose of this Update

This update provides the interested public with current information about the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program.

Reintroduction Program

The reintroduction program is entering its second year. There are currently five free-ranging Mexican gray wolves in two family groups, five are awaiting release from acclimation pens, and we plan to move six others to release locations over the next few months. There will be six potential breeding pairs in the wild in 1999, and only two sub-adult pack members. We are emphasizing releasing bonded adult pairs without their offspring this year, so that we can focus our management efforts on pairs with the potential to produce wild-born pups.

We will try a variety of modified release techniques this year to help us place wolves in very remote locations. Two groups will be placed in experimental soft release pens (Coalson and Squaw Creek locations – [see map](#)) constructed of heavy-duty nylon mesh reinforced with electric fencing. This is a very low-impact pen that is relatively easy to construct in remote locations. In addition, we will try a hard release (no acclimation pen) of a mated pair of wolves in the Blue Range Primitive Area. Wolves will be packed in to remote locations using specially designed panniers carried by mules.

There were many successes and challenges in the first year. Released captive-reared wolves learned to hunt native prey, established home ranges, and killed no livestock. One pair successfully bred and raised a pup to three months of age. However, only two of the 11 initially released wolves remained in the wild by December 1998. Five were shot, one disappeared and is believed dead, and three were returned to captivity for management reasons. The wild-born pup also disappeared after his mother was shot.

Closures

Forest closures of approximately one-mile radius are established during the time that wolves occupy acclimation pens, and also may be in effect around den sites when necessary. Closures are currently in effect at the Campbell Blue (CB) and Coalson release pens. Releases are anticipated in mid-April from the Coalson pen. The CB pen closure may remain in effect through June to allow the wolves to den in the pen.

Wolf/Prey Interactions

Wolves have been self-sufficient during this reporting period. They were not supplemented except when newly-released from acclimation pens or as a management action to localize animals. During the hunting season,

wolves often scavenged on unretrieved hunter kills. Since March 1998, biologists have investigated 22 prey items fed upon by wolves. Twenty were elk. Of these, 10 were calves, two were very old (over sixteen years), five were adults, one was a yearling, and two could not be determined. One white-tailed deer and one mule deer were also documented. Of the 22 prey items located by biologists, seven were confirmed kills by the wolves, seven were probable kills, and the cause of death could not be determined, or was attributed to another cause, for eight.

Wolf/Human Interactions

♂ CB female #174 was illegally shot on August 7 in the Williams Valley area. At the time of her death, she and her mate and pup were apparently feeding on an elk calf killed and cached by a mountain lion. The incident is still under investigation.

♂ Sub-adult Hawks Nest (HN) female #493 (October 18), yearling HN male #532 (November 7), and yearling HN male #531 (November 23) also were illegally killed by gunshot. Investigations on all shootings are still open.

♂ On December 18, the CB pair visited a hunter's camp four miles northeast of their acclimation pen. The pair scavenged about 15-20 lbs of meat from a hunter-killed white-tailed deer carcass hanging near the camp. At least five people from the camp observed the wolves and did not attempt to discourage them. Project personnel stayed at the camp on December 19 and hazed the wolves away when they returned. The wolves did not return again before the hunters moved camp on December 26.

♂ A 10-month old female (#563) from the newly-released Pipestem pack was found dead on Highway 191 by a passing motorist March 21. The necropsy to determine the cause of death is still pending.

Wolf/Livestock and Wolf/Pet Interactions

No livestock depredation or injuries to domestic dogs occurred during this reporting period. All wolves were located within allotments which had livestock, including cows with calves present. The following interactions were documented:

♂ The HN wolves were observed harassing dogs on July 6, the rancher chased the wolves off on horseback.

♂ A lone wolf was observed around a group of cattle after dark, it then approached a Rottweiler dog as if to solicit play. There was no aggression and the wolf moved on.

♂ On August 2 the CB wolves killed an adult elk 400 yards from a corral containing 100 head of cattle. The rancher tending the cattle observed the wolves in the area and said the wolves did not bother the cattle.

♂ On September 12, the HN wolves killed an elk calf in a pasture while cattle, horses and a burro were present. The ranch caretakers watched the wolves feeding on the kill and did not observe them bothering the livestock. Project personnel dragged the kill out of the pasture onto adjacent Forest Service lands.

♂ CB male #166 was observed sniffing the ground where a dog had laid near a residence on August 24. The resident fired a shot in the air and the wolf left. On August 27, the same wolf was observed sniffing through the fence where three large dogs were kept. The owner frightened the wolf away. On September 14, the wolf was observed laying near a kennel with dogs for about 30 minutes, then moved off. All incidents occurred within a few weeks after the CB male's mate was killed and his pup disappeared.

♂ On November 17, HN male #131 was observed chasing sheep in Alpine, AZ. The wolf ran away when the rancher fired into the air.

On December 16, HN male #131 fed on domestic pig parts that were left over from butchering and put out by a rancher for his pets. Project personnel visited the ranch, talked with the rancher, removed the pig parts, and harassed the wolf out of the area.

Female wolf #486 was observed feeding on a cow carcass that had died from other causes and been dumped on January 16. She was trapped by project personnel at the carcass and returned to her acclimation pen to facilitate pair bonding with her new mate.

Coordination

The fourth and fifth meetings of the Interagency Management Advisory Group (IMAG) were held in Reserve, NM (July 15) and Springerville, AZ (November 17). Following the November 17 IMAG meeting, the Service hosted a facilitated two-day Research Priorities Workshop in Springerville, AZ. About 25 people representing 10 different areas of interest and expertise participated. The workshop was the second portion of a two-step process designed by the USGS New Mexico Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit to obtain public input to help the Service establish research priorities for the Mexican wolf program.

USFWS personnel participated in the annual meeting of the bi-national Mexican Wolf Species Survival Plan meeting in Durango, Mexico, July 20-24. Pairings, transfers, and other management issues for the captive wolf population were made at this meeting.

The Tribal Council for the White Mountain Apache Tribe passed a resolution endorsing limited re-establishment of Mexican wolves on tribal lands. Wolf recovery would occur by dispersal of wolves reintroduced to the Apache National Forest and natural reproduction by these dispersers on the Reservation. These wolves will be managed according to an agreement yet to be reached between the Tribe and the USFWS.

Wolf project personnel presented a public update on the Mexican wolf project in Reserve, NM, October 7. The meeting was co-hosted by the Catron County Commission and the USFWS. Approximately 35 people attended the meeting.

The wolf program held a project review on January 11. About 25 experts in wolf biology and recovery and law enforcement attended the review.

A Citizens Advisory Committee has been established by the community of Alpine, AZ, to facilitate communication between the wolf project and citizens. Project personnel participated in the introductory meeting on February 24.

Outreach

The Mexican Wolf Interagency Reporting Hotline is still operational. Call toll-free **1-888-459-WOLF (9653)** to report sightings, harassment, or taking of Mexican wolves, or to report livestock depredation.

Field updates are provided on the USFWS Mexican wolf web site approximately every two weeks at <http://ifw2es.fws.gov/mexicanwolf/>.

One-page updates for local Arizona residents are posted regularly in Alpine, Springerville, and Clifton in various public places, such as post offices, libraries, and USFS offices.

Large signs providing information on the reintroduction and recommendations to minimize wolf/human conflicts have been posted at strategic locations throughout the Apache National Forest.

Special mailings providing information about Mexican wolves were sent to approximately 6,000 hunters in Arizona and approximately 15,000 hunters in New Mexico.

The Arizona Heritage Alliance organized an informational wolf weekend held at Hannagan Meadows Lodge on July 11-12. About 20 participants learned about the history and status of the project, visited an abandoned wolf

acclimation pen, were briefed on wolf monitoring techniques, and observed wolf prey species.

Project personnel presented papers on Mexican wolf recovery to about 350 participants at the Defenders of Wildlife "Wolf Restoration Conference" in Seattle, WA, on November 12-14.

Numerous presentations were made by project staff to educational institutions, civic groups, and non-profit organizations. Project biologists have conducted many media interviews and field visits.

Project personnel participated in a MSNBC live broadcast panel discussion on Dec 1 with representatives from both the Arizona and the New Mexico Cattle Growers' Associations and with *Dances with Wolves* screenwriter Michael Blake.

The following national television networks aired news segments on the Mexican Wolf Project on the following dates: CNN - Dec 6; NBC Today - Dec 8; NBC Nightly News - Dec 10; ABC News - Dec 18. Several local stations also ran stories on the project.

Partnership Activities

A total of 40 facilities (29 in the US and 11 in Mexico) now participate in the Mexican wolf captive breeding program. The Ladder Ranch and the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, both in New Mexico, and Wolf Haven International in Washington state manage Mexican wolves for pre-acclimation release purposes. All cooperating captive management facilities manage Mexican wolves at their own cost.

A Mexican Wolf Keeper Workshop sponsored by the Wild Canid Survival and Research Center was held October 22-23. Many representatives from Mexico participated to learn about the care and handling of Mexican wolves in captivity.

David Parsons (USFWS) presented an overview of the wolf project to about 150 people at the Rio Grande Zoo on October 17 at an event co-sponsored by the Zoo and Defenders of Wildlife to announce the commercial availability of "Wolf Country Beef" in the Albuquerque area. New Mexico rancher Jim Winder signed an agreement with Defenders of Wildlife certifying his beef under this new label. Under the agreement, Winder will support wolf recovery on his private and leased public lands, use only non-lethal predator control methods, and employ non-ecologically degrading ranching practices.

The U.S. Forest Service continues to provide valuable support and technical assistance for the wolf project. The Service's Pinetop Fisheries Resources Office also provides administrative and technical support and assistance with local outreach activities.

Steve Crozier with Tierra Realty Trust led the effort with volunteers from Prescott College and others to construct the Engineer Springs acclimation pen. Volunteers Jason and Maryanne Brownel designed an experimental remote carcass delivery system for the Engineer Springs pen.

The Defenders of Wildlife continues to offer reimbursement to ranchers for confirmed losses of livestock.

Captive Population Update

There are currently 174 Mexican wolves in the captive population. There are 31 breeding pairs in place for the 1999 breeding season. Seven of these are potential release candidate pairs. The captive population produced 20 surviving pups in 1998.

Turkey Creek female wolf #128, (returned to Sevilleta May 3) was sent to The Living Desert facility in Palm Desert, CA. She is paired with a new mate and will remain in captivity.

HN female #494 (returned to Sevilleta on May 28) was transferred to a breeding facility in Chihuahua, Mexico. Mexico intends to use her for their future releases.

CB female #511 (returned to Sevilleta on May 18) was allowed to select a mate by being placed with three sibling male wolves on September 14. She selected #509 (the biggest one of the bunch), and they are now candidates for the upcoming hard release in the Blue Range Primitive Area.

Females #482 and #486 were captured at the Ladder Ranch facility on November 16 and transported to the Engineer Springs and Campbell Blue pens, respectively, to provide new mates for the two remaining wild wolves (alpha male #166 from the CB pack and alpha male #131 from the HN pack) after the death of their previous mates. The transfer of #486 was attended by Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt and Nancy Kaufman (Regional Director USFWS), Duane Shroufe (Director AGFD), and Phil Settles (Alpine District Ranger USFS).

Litigation

The lawsuit against the Mexican wolf reintroduction project titled *New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association, et al. v. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, et al.*, CV 98-367 (D.N.M.) remains active. The Defenders of Wildlife and 13 other parties were admitted by the Court as "Defendant-Intervenors", meaning that these groups are now also parties to the lawsuit. The Cattle Growers' first motion for a preliminary injunction was withdrawn under an agreement where the USFWS would notify them in advance of additional releases. In December 1998, following the release of two female wolves, the Cattle Growers' filed a second motion for a preliminary injunction. Reply briefs related to this motion are expected to be completed by mid-April. When the last brief is submitted to the Court, a date for a hearing on the motion will likely be set. The objective of the motion for preliminary injunction is to stop the USFWS from releasing any more wolves until the lawsuit is resolved.

Life in Wolf Country

*The following letter is the first submission to this feature of our newsletter. We encourage individuals living within or near the wolf recovery area to share their experiences, insights, and ideas with other readers. We hope to foster open discussion of important issues and concerns of local residents. Guidelines? Articles must be respectful of others and be 250 words or less. We will publish letters verbatim if possible. If we must edit, we will do our best to retain its original intent. **Please submit letters to either of the two addresses at the end of this update.***

Good Day,

Much, perhaps too much, has already been written, talked about, and debated regarding the right of all species to exist. The Mexican Wolf Recovery Program in Arizona and New Mexico, and others like it, are finally doing something real to make sure that all of us will enjoy the benefits that a diversity of life brings.

For almost two years I lived in Kodiak, Alaska, in the proximity of brown bears, bald eagles, and foxes... not to mention the offshore presence of puffins, seal, and whales. Some of these wild neighbors I was privileged to see, others probably saw me, and quietly went on their way. I cannot imagine Kodiak without the beauty, the excitement, the wonder and wildness that these creatures bring to it!

I did not come to Arizona four years ago with the tame idea that my four-footed neighbors would be the usual cattle, dogs, and cats... but with the expectation that it could offer something more. And now it does! I support the work of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and all forward-thinking people in efforts like the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program.

Finally, I may not see a wolf in the wild in my lifetime, (though I hope I do) but, as the saying goes, it's sure nice to know they're out there.

Domeinco
DiToro

Flagstaff,
AZ

Information Materials

Many information materials are available through our web site: <http://ifw2es.fws.gov/mexicanwolf/>

You may also contact us at the addresses below. We welcome your ideas about our written communications, our general outreach efforts, and any specific suggestions you have about how to improve the *Project Update*:

Mexican Wolf Recovery Leader

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

P.O. Box 1306

Albuquerque, NM 87103

or

Regional Nongame Specialist

Arizona Game and Fish Department

HC 66 Box 57201

Pinetop, AZ 85935

Release Locations of Mexican Gray Wolves 1998-1999

